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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000215

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TAGS: PREL RU FR  
SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENCY ON MEDVEDEV VISIT, MISTRAL SALE  
AND RUSSIA-NATO ISSUES

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Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone for reas  
ons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶11. (C/NF) Summary. During a wide-ranging conversation on February 22, a relatively pessimistic Francois Richier, Strategic Affairs Advisor to President Sarkozy, said France sees some opportunities, and potential pitfalls, ahead as they work with Russia on a new UN Security Council Resolution on Iran, take next steps on the European Security discussion, address Missile Defense and prepare the upcoming NATO summit in Lisbon. French officials found the recent release of the newly updated Russian Strategic Doctrine to be worrying and little different from that of ten years ago. Paris expects to raise some of these issues in the upcoming March 2 visit of Russian President Medvedev to France. Richier noted that the potential sale of the French Mistral ship to Russia has "not really progressed" largely because Russia has yet to decide what it wants and put a firm request on the table. However, he noted that Russia is now also interested in purchasing some French armored vehicles for the Russian police. End Summary.

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MEDVEDEV VISIT TO PARIS  
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¶12. (C/NF) Richier described that the upcoming Medvedev visit to Russia as focused mainly on a bilateral agenda. However, he noted that the two principal foreign affairs issues which President Sarkozy plans to raise are: 1) the need to move now on Iran sanctions; and (2) the Russian proposals for a European Security treaty. On the former, Richier said it is difficult to know what the Russian position is on sanctions against Iran, as their position has merely shifted from a firm "no" of a few years ago to a mere willingness to discuss the issue, without any specific details. Sarkozy intends to speak seriously with Medvedev to make progress. On the latter, Richier admitted that French officials were not sure how to approach the Russian proposals for a new European security treaty, particularly in light of the release of the nominally "updated" Russian strategic military doctrine which continues to target NATO as the primary threat. The Elysee hopes to learn if Medvedev "genuinely thinks that way" or if it merely reflects the continuing influence of the "old guard" in the Russian military. Even if it is simply a triumph of the old guard, Richier conceded that would show that Medvedev has no real power. "So either way, it isn't good," he stated.

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POTENTIAL MISTRAL SALE  
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¶13. (C/NF) Richier informed us that the potential sale of the

French Mistral ship to Russia has "not really advanced" largely because they have no response to their proposals and no actual order from Moscow. He claimed that the Netherlands and Spain remain interested in selling their own versions of the warship to Russia. Richier speculated that the Russian navy may in fact prefer the French ship, but it is not really the military leaders who will make the final decision, which will take into account cost and political considerations. At the same time, he stated that he was "unsure" why the Russians would choose the Mistral, as it is not a "real war ship" and to equip it as such would "take the entire Russian navy budget." Richier acknowledged that the potential sale has raised concerns among some of Russia's neighbors and informed us that State Secretary for European Affairs, Pierre Lellouche, would travel soon to the three Baltic countries, Ukraine and Poland to try to address their worries. Richier added that Moscow has recently expressed interest in purchasing French armored cars for the Russian police.

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RUSSIA-NATO  
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¶4. (C/NF) Finally, Richier speculated about the role of Russia at the November NATO summit in Lisbon. He noted that Moscow remained "irritated" by missile defense planning and that its rhetoric was once again mounting, so that would be a continuing issue for engagement. He observed that since there was no summit meeting of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) last year in Strasbourg, the last time leaders of NATO and Russia met together was in Bucharest in 2008 when Putin was President. He expressed concern that Russian leaders might feel "sidelined" if there is no NRC this year, particularly if there is no clear progress in the OSCE Corfu Process to address Russian security concerns. Richier admitted that

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France had no official position on this issue as of yet, but noted that it was worth some thought and discussion, as we all try to find the best means to work together with Russia.  
PEKALA